CANADA'S NEW GOVERNMENT

TURNING A NEW LEAF

Thirty-Ninth Parliament, April 4, 2006

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Honourable Members of the Senate,
Members of the House of Commons,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I am honoured to welcome the newly elected members of the House of Commons on the occasion of the opening of the First Session of the Thirty-Ninth Parliament of Canada. Canadians rejoice in the coming eightieth birthday of Her Majesty later this month, and in her more than fifty years of service as Queen of Canada.

Since my appointment as Governor General of Canada, I have had the privilege of meeting women and men who each and every day, and each in their own way, reaffirm their attachment to this vast land that we share and where people from around the world have found a home. Women and men of ideas, conviction and action who have an abiding sense of responsibility, solidarity and commitment to their neighbourhoods, to their communities and to their country. And I am moved to see just how strong and vibrant a country we are.

I have been particularly struck by the words of our young people and by their wealth of ideas. Young people who are looking to carve out their place and be heard. The new generation of

Aboriginal entrepreneurs who are creating new opportunities. Young people in our Canadian Forces who, through their extraordinary efforts, offer a promise of hope for the oppressed. More than ever, our young people represent not only the promise of a brighter future, but also the vitality of our present.

I have met with people from our two great linguistic communities and I can attest that our linguistic duality is a tremendous asset for the country. Similarly, Canadian artists from all disciplines have confirmed to me just how important creative expression is to the health of a democratic society.

And I have heard from Canadians who feel they often lack a voice. Women who are victims of violence. Families newly arrived in Canada who seek to contribute to our society and our country's collective well-being.

Listening to citizens from all walks of life has strengthened my already deep conviction that we are living in a country where everything is possible, where each of us is free to follow his or her dreams but also has a duty to help build our country and prepare it for the challenges that lie ahead.

Building a Stronger Canada

On January 23, the Canadian people elected a new government. The Government is honoured by the responsibility it has been given for managing the affairs of our great country.

Canada is uniquely blessed in the strength and diversity of its people and regions. Through hard work, foresight and good fortune, we have come together to make our vast country one of the most successful the world has ever seen.

The distance we have travelled is remarkable. A country once perceived to be at the edge of the world is now at the leading edge of science, business, the arts and sport. Whether it is on the podium in Turin, on the rugged hills of Afghanistan, or in the bustling markets of Asia, Canadians demonstrate time and time again that they are leaders.

The Government is proud of what Canadians have accomplished so far, and is inspired by the country's bright prospects. It believes in the capacity of Canadians to seize the enormous opportunities before them and build an even stronger Canada, striving for excellence, anchored by enduring values, and infused with growing confidence that they can make a difference at home and in the world.

In support of building a stronger Canada, the Government's agenda will be clear and focused. It will clean up government, provide real support to ordinary working families and strengthen our federation as well as our role in the world.

Turning a New Leaf

Canadians have chosen change. They want a government that treats their tax dollars with respect. A government that puts ordinary working people and their families first. A government that is accountable.

This Government has been given a mandate to lead the change demanded by the Canadian people.

Leading change in a minority Parliament means working together. To this end, the Government will look for shared goals and common ideas that will help Canadians build a stronger Canada.

It is time to turn a new leaf.

Bringing Accountability Back to Government

No aspect of responsible government is more fundamental than having the trust of citizens. Canadians' faith in the institutions and practices of government has been eroded. This new government trusts in the Canadian people, and its goal is that Canadians will once again trust in their government. It is time for accountability.

To restore this trust, the first piece of legislation the Government will bring forward will be the Federal Accountability Act.

This omnibus legislation and the associated Accountability Action Plan will change the current system of oversight and management by strengthening the rules and institutions that ensure transparency and accountability to Canadians. The legislation will ban institutional and large personal donations to political parties; it will ensure that positions of public trust cannot be used as stepping stones to private lobbying; and it will provide real protection for whistle-blowers who show great courage in coming forward to do what is right.

The Government will strengthen the capacity and independence of officers of Parliament, including the Auditor General, to hold the Government to account. It will increase the transparency of appointments, contracts and auditing within government departments and Crown corporations.

Effective checks and balances are important, but they are not enough. The trust of citizens must be earned every day. The Government will work to earn that trust.

Helping Ordinary Working Canadians and Their Families

This Government believes that Canadians pay too much in tax. The Government's tax plan will, over time, reduce the tax burden on all Canadians.

To this end, the Government will reduce the Goods and Services Tax by one percent. Cutting the GST will help all Canadians deal with the rising cost of living, put money back in people's pockets and help stimulate the economy.

Cutting the GST is the best way to lower taxes for all Canadians, including low-income Canadians who need it most.

The Government will continue with a responsible approach to lowering taxes for the benefit of Canadians and the Canadian economy, including a further reduction of the GST to five percent.

Tackling Crime

Canadians have always taken pride in our low crime rates. Safe streets have long characterized Canada's communities—from villages to towns to cities. Safe communities allow families and businesses to prosper.

Unfortunately, our safe streets and healthy communities are increasingly under threat of gun, gang and drug violence.

This Government will tackle crime. It will propose changes to the Criminal Code to provide tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders, particularly those involved in weapons-related crimes. It will help prevent crime by putting more police on the street and improving the security of our borders.

It is equally important that we prevent criminal behaviour before it has a chance to take root. To this end, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to help communities provide hope and opportunity for our youth, and end the cycle of violence that can lead to broken communities and broken lives.

Providing Child Care Choice and Support

Strong families ensure a bright future for Canada. The most important investment we can make as a country is to help families raise their children.

This Government understands that no two Canadian families are exactly alike. Each has its own circumstances and needs. Parents must be able to choose the child care that is best for

them. The Government will help Canadian parents, as they seek to balance work and family life, by supporting their child care choices through direct financial support.

In collaboration with the provinces and territories, employers and community non-profit organizations, it will also encourage the creation of new child care spaces.

Ensuring Canadians Get the Health Care They Have Paid For

Canadians have paid their taxes to support our system of public health insurance. But all too often, they find themselves waiting too long for critical procedures. That is not good enough. It is time Canadians received the health care they have paid for.

The Government will engage the provinces and territories on a patient wait times guarantee for medically necessary services. This guarantee will make sure that all Canadians receive essential medical treatment within clinically acceptable waiting times.

A health system that is timely and sustainable will require innovation. The Government will support and enable innovative approaches to health care delivery consistent with the principles of a universally accessible and equitable public health care system embodied in the *Canada Health Act*.

A Canada That Works for All of Us

One of Canada's greatest strengths is our federal system of government. The founders of our country had the foresight to build a flexible federal system that would accommodate our diversity and build upon the unique strengths of the different parts of our federation.

To remain strong and effective, our federation must keep pace with the evolving needs of Canadian society. Building on the work begun in the last Parliament, this Government will seek to involve parliamentarians and citizens in examining the challenges facing Canada's electoral system and democratic institutions. At the same time, it will explore means to ensure that the Senate better reflects both the democratic values of Canadians and the needs of Canada's regions.

All too often, the strength of our federation is compromised by jurisdictional squabbles that obscure accountabilities and prevent governments from working together in the best interests of Canadians.

This new government will take a new approach. It is committed to building a better federation in which governments come together to help Canadians realize their potential. To this end, the Government will respond to concerns about the fiscal imbalance and will work to ensure fiscal arrangements in which all governments have access to the resources they need to meet their responsibilities.

The Government is committed to an open federalism that recognizes the unique place of a strong, vibrant Quebec in a united Canada. It will work with the government and legislature of Quebec in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration to advance the aspirations of Quebecers.

In the international community, Canada is stronger when we speak with one voice, but that voice must belong to all of us. In a more interdependent world, decisions on international issues increasingly affect not only countries, but also individuals, communities and regions.

This is why the Government will facilitate provincial participation in the development of Canadian positions that affect areas of provincial responsibility. The Government recognizes the special cultural responsibilities of the Government of Quebec and will therefore invite Quebec to play a role in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. By harnessing the diversity of experience and expertise found within our federation, we can present a strong, united and confident voice to the world.

Canada—Strong, United, Independent and Free

Canada's voice in the world must be supported by action, both at home and abroad. Advancing our interests in a complex and sometimes dangerous world requires confidence and the independent capacity to defend our country's sovereignty and the security of our citizens.

The Government will work cooperatively with our friends and allies and constructively with the international community to advance common values and interests. In support of this goal, it will build stronger multilateral and bilateral relationships, starting with Canada's relationship with the United States, our best friend and largest trading partner.

More broadly, this Government is committed to supporting Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights around the world. In this regard, the Government will support a more robust diplomatic role for Canada, a stronger military and a more effective use of Canadian aid dollars.

Just as it honours the past efforts of our veterans, the Government stands firmly behind the vital role being played by our troops in Afghanistan today. The dedicated Canadians in Afghanistan deserve all of our support as they risk their lives to defend our national interests, combat global terrorism and help the Afghan people make a new start as a free, democratic and peaceful country.

Conclusion

The Government's clear and focused agenda reflects its commitment to Canadians. It will not try to do all things at once. Instead, the Government will work diligently to make tangible improvements that contribute to stronger families and safer communities, and a stronger country.

During this Thirty-Ninth Parliament, the Government will be bringing forward fiscally responsible budgets and a legislative program that will achieve the results that Canadians expect from their elected representatives. In this work, it will rely on the support and counsel of a dedicated and professional Public Service. In turn, it will give the Public Service the leadership and tools it needs to excel in the service of Canadians. Recognizing the important role of parliamentarians, members of Parliament will be asked to conduct comprehensive

reviews of key federal legislation, including the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, the *Anti-Terrorism Act* and the *Bank Act.* The Government will act in Parliament to offer an apology for the Chinese Head Tax. Significant international treaties will be submitted for votes in Parliament.

Over the course of its mandate, and starting with the clear priorities set out today, the Government will work diligently to build a record of results. It will promote a more competitive, more productive Canadian economy. It will seek to improve opportunity for all Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants. It will work to improve the security of seniors. It will take measures to achieve tangible improvements in our environment, including reductions in pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

This Government recognizes the unique challenges faced by those who make their livelihood from our land and oceans in our vital natural resource and agriculture industries. It will take action to secure a prosperous future for Canadian agriculture, following years of neglect. It will respond to short-term needs, create separate and more effective farm income stabilization and disaster relief programs and work with producers and partners to achieve long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

Together, the Government's actions will ensure Canada's future success.

With the efforts and contributions of members from both chambers, the Government looks forward to making this Parliament work for the benefit of the Canadian people.

Members of the House of Commons:

You will be asked to appropriate the funds required to carry out the services and expenditures authorized by Parliament.

Honourable Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Commons:

May Divine Providence guide your deliberations.